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Article

# The Rocky Road towards Professional Autonomy: The Estonian Journalists' Organization in the Political Turmoil of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

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## Abstract

This article attempts to explain the relationships between journalists, politics and the state from the perspective of collective autonomy, that of the professional organization of journalists. The case of Estonian Journalists' Union demonstrates the complexity and historical contingency of professional autonomy of journalism. The development of the Estonian journalists' organization occurred as a sequence of transformations from the Estonian Journalists' Association to the Estonian Journalists' Union to the Soviet type journalists' union, and lastly to an independent trade union. This sequence was disrupted by several fatal breakdowns that changed not only the character of the association, but also professional values, the whole occupational ideology and the conditions of the existence of journalism as a profession in Estonia.

## Keywords

Estonian Journalists' Organization; history; journalists; politics; professional autonomy

## Issue

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## 1. Introduction

By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, journalism in industrialized countries gradually began to separate from other fields as a regular occupation with a certain common identity, norms and values that united journalists. Like other trades that strove to bolster their legitimacy and raise their social status, journalists established their first associations in Germany in the 1860s, Great Britain, the United States, Scandinavia in the 1880s, in the Baltic countries in the 1900s (Høyer & Lauk, 2016). Establishing an organization is one of the key elements of the development of a profession. As history has convincingly demonstrated, both the success and failure of journalists' organizations are closely connected to a country's political climate. It is always a struggle to gain and maintain an organization's independence.<sup>1</sup> Achieving recognition and legitimacy to the occupation as an independent agent is an important function of a professional associa-

tion. Association consolidates the profession by defining common occupational standards, codes of ethics, educational requirements, and establishing some sort of control over the entry to the field. The launch of a professional association clearly reflects the occupation's aspirations to achieve a degree of autonomy from other institutions in society. By the 1920s, journalists' associations were actively involved in 'profession building'. They used various strategies to legitimize the occupation and began to make efforts for influencing the press-related legislation (Dooley, 1997; Juraite, Lauk, & Zelče, 2009). The aim of these efforts was to achieve a legal framework, which would allow the profession self-governance and to avoid restriction of the freedom of the press by governments (Waisbord, 2013).

Journalistic autonomy has been conceptualized at three levels: individual, organizational/collective and institutional. Individual autonomy includes journalists' abilities to freely select both information and aspects of their

<sup>1</sup> For the history of international movement of journalists see Nordenstreng, Beyersdorf, Høyer and Lauk, 2016.

stories, as well as their position concerning their organizational and work culture (Balčytienė, Raeymaeckers, & Vartanova, 2015). Organizational autonomy refers to the news organization's independence from external political or other constraints (Reich & Hanitzsch, 2013). Institutional autonomy refers to media's freedom from any kinds of governmental surveillance, and a legally secured right for expression and access to information (Harroloit, Lauk, Kuutti, & Loit, 2012; McQuail, 2010; Scholl & Weischenberg, 1999). Hallin and Mancini (2004, p. 35) point out that journalistic professional autonomy is always relative, as 'control over the work process is to a significant extent collegial' and individual journalists cannot control the media organizations outright. They extend the notion of professional autonomy to 'the corps of journalists taken as a whole' (Hallin & Mancini, 2004), i.e. to the occupational community of journalists. They also emphasize that there is considerable variety of the degree of autonomy across media systems and within media systems, as well as over time. There are always various political and economic pressures that limit both individual and collective autonomy. Contemporary research has found that journalists recognize the pressures stemming from within the profession (e.g. ethical conventions) and their working environment (newsrooms, working routines etc.) the most immediately affecting their individual decision-making (Hanitzsch et al., 2010, p. 15). The factors of political origin (legal framework of their working conditions, degree of press freedom etc.) journalists confront at the institutional/systemic level collectively. Their associations endeavour to negotiate with other agents and agencies in society with the aim of providing journalists with working conditions where they are safe and relatively independent. Journalists' collective actions may also take other forms, especially under extreme violence, and where their organizations are unable to exert influence. In Mexico, for example, under the conditions of unprecedented violence in 2011–2012 linked to war between drug trafficking groups, journalists established networks of collective resistance to ameliorate the situation and increase the safety of journalists (González de Bustamante & Relly, 2016).

Taking the story of the Estonian journalists' organization as an example, the article seeks the answer to the question: What are the chances and challenges of an organization for maintaining and safeguarding the profession's autonomy, and the existence of journalistic occupational community during political turmoil? The article casts light on the issues concerning the political involvement of Estonian journalists' organization in the interwar and post-WWII periods and the attempts to maintain collective autonomy and professional integrity.

Most of the studies on the history of the Estonian journalists' organization deal with its life story from inception till 1940 (Aru, 2009; Juraite et al., 2009; Lauk, 1991, 1993, 1994, 1995; Lauk & Pallas, 2008). Only one study is available about the first decades of the Soviet Estonian journalists' union (Hanson, 1973), plus some

popular articles and books (e.g., Tiikmaa, 2013; Tootsen, 2004). These publications are primarily focused on the details of the activities of the organization and related individuals. The social-political context and how this framed the activities and fate of the organization has received less attention. The story of the Estonian journalists' organization throughout various periods of the country's history clearly brings forth the political and historical contingency of journalistic professional autonomy.

Methodologically, the article is based on the existing research on Estonian journalism and critical analysis of relevant archive documents of journalists' association and Estonian Communist Party (ECP).

## 2. Background

The first attempts of Estonian journalists to organize as a trade were made in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century when the first meetings of newspapermen took place. By the 1910s–1920s, the newspaper field in the Baltic countries had separated from other creative fields, and journalism became a fulltime occupation.

The political turmoil of the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was unfavourable for inaugurating any new associations, including journalists. The outbreak of WWI, the German occupation and consequent struggle for independence against the Red Army in all three Baltic countries clearly hindered, but did not stop the launch of journalists' organizations. Latvian journalists organized in 1917, Estonian in 1919 and finally, Lithuanian in 1922 (Juraite et al., 2009).

Legally, the Estonian Journalists' Association (EJA) was founded on June 14, 1919, when three experienced journalists (Jaan Tomp, Jakob Mändmets, and Paul Olak) from the largest dailies in Tallinn officially registered the association. They were concerned about the social guarantees of journalists and the general professional level of Estonian journalism during the political turmoil of 1917–1919. Five days later they invited colleagues to the founding meeting of the EJA, but only a small number of Tallinn journalists appeared. A temporary committee was elected to prepare the first general meeting, which occurred on November 4, 1919 and legitimately established the EJA with 30 founding members present (Aru, 2009, p. 928).

Many journalists were fighting in the War for Independence, so the Association was engaged in maintaining contacts with journalists in the battlefields and dispatching newspapers to the fronts. After the war, the Association stopped working for a short period, and was reactivated in April 1921 at the first congress of Estonian journalists in Tallinn. In 1925, the Association was reorganized into the Estonian Journalists' Union (EJU), which joined the *Fédération Internationale des Journalistes* (FIJ) in 1930. Most of the EJU's members worked in the editorial offices of national and regional newspapers and magazines (Juraite et al., 2009, pp. 185–186). By 1939, the EJU had 166 members (out of about 700

journalists working in the press and radio in the 1930s) (Lauk, 1994).

The EJU existed until 1940, when it was converted into a Soviet trade union under the Soviet occupational authorities, and ceased to function during WWII. During the German occupation (from the summer of 1941 until September 1944) no attempts were made to either revive the old or establish a new journalists' organization. After the war, under the Soviet occupation, a new organization—the Journalists' Union of the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic (JUESSR)—was established as late as 1957. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the organization was not dissolved, but continued to exist with a diminishing membership and an unclear identity. In the mid-1990s, the Union's activity revived, and in 1996 the Union joined the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), and in 1998 the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ).

The development of the Estonian journalists' organization was disrupted by several fatal breakdowns that changed not only the character of the association, but also professional values, the entire occupational ideology and the conditions of the existence of journalism as a profession in Estonia. The freedom of the press existed in Estonia only for 14 years (from 1920 to 1934) in the inter-war period, and again from 1991 onwards, which equates to less than 50 years for the 250 years of the history of Estonian journalism.

### **3. The Triangle of the Press, State Power and Politics Framing the Activities of the Estonian Journalists' Organization**

#### *3.1. Common Goal with the Government—Building Up a Nation State*

Independent statehood and freedom of the press enshrined in the 1920's Constitution of the Estonian Republic granted the press and journalists nearly unlimited possibilities to critically examine the activities of politicians and governments. The Publishing Act of 1923 did not limit this freedom, except for some restrictions related to state security and state secrets. Both journalists and politicians understood the importance of journalism in forming public opinion and encouraging citizen activism, as well as in state building and strengthening democratic governance. A leading journalist and simultaneously a leading politician Jaan Tõnisson declared: 'The various trends and nuances of public opinion cannot be expressed and distributed without journalism. This underlines the increasing importance of journalism in all democratic countries' (Tõnisson, 1923, p. 17). Furthermore, the idea of Estonia as an independent nation state was for the first time ever, formulated in the press, in the leading daily *Postimees/Postman* in 1917 (Lauk, 2000, p. 26).

The congress of Estonian journalists in April 1921 approved three principles of journalistic activity as the un-

derlying guidelines of the EJA: 1) instilling in citizens a sense of duty to their state, 2) shaping a deeper understanding of the importance of national independence and 3) being critical and consistent, but always accurate in reporting (Høyer, Lauk, & Vihalemm, 1993, p. 135).

The aims of the EJA were in line with the general internal policy of the governments of the 1920s. However, common goals were not seen as a conflict between journalistic independence and any loyalty to the state. In previous critical times in Estonia's history, journalism had largely served national interests, so journalists' support for the nation state in the early 1920s seemed a logical continuation of this tradition. Both politicians and journalists saw the press as an efficient means for building up a democratic nation state (Lauk, 2000). However, the press did not serve the government, but the idea and aspirations of a democratic nation state. Until the beginning of the 1930s, none of the spheres of Estonian society restricted access to the press, and only direct propaganda against national independence was impeded. Thus, Estonian journalism in the early 1920s was able to become an efficient means of social control and 'to offer a critical scrutiny of society, politics, and the economy' (Høyer et al., 1993; Waisbord, 2013, p. 44).

The 1920s was also an active time of 'profession building': the norms and standards of journalism, as well as the role of journalist in society were actively discussed both in public and in the journal of the organization. The EJU established travel grants and educational stipends, as well as some training courses, and arranged field trips for its members. Membership fees and some donations and investments made the organization financially independent, but not wealthy (Juraite et al., 2009).

#### *3.2. Democracy Crisis Is Also a Media Crisis*

The December 1924 attempted coup by Russia-supported communists provoked demands to reform the Constitution to strengthen the power of the President. The international economic crisis of the 1930s accelerated the constitutional crisis. Declining living standards, rising unemployment and increasing dissatisfaction with government added heat to the political tensions by the early 1930s. These tensions clearly affected the relationships between the press and the government, and the EJU and the government.

In 1930, a law on a state of emergency was enacted that gave the Chief of Interior Defence extraordinary rights, including the introduction of pre-publication censorship and confiscation of printed matter (Riigi Teataja, 1930, p. 749). Under this law, a state of emergency and pre-publication censorship were declared in the summer of 1933, when the political crisis reached its climax. Paradoxically, the Prime Minister, who was responsible for the state of emergency, was Jaan Tõnisson, one of Estonia's most prestigious journalists. He was extremely critical towards the press, accusing it of irresponsibility, and undermining the authority of the politicians and the gov-

ernment (Päevaleht, 1933, p. 1). In October, in his speech in the Riigikogu (Parliament), Tõnisson said: 'No government or state institution forbids criticizing their activities in the press. The aim of censorship is not suppressing freedom of expression, but saving its honour and right for life'.<sup>2</sup> As a journalist and editor-in-chief, Tõnisson had never accepted censorship, but as politician, he did his utmost to restrain the power of the press (Aru, 2008).

All daily newspapers in Tallinn unanimously protested censorship by stopping publication of editorials and news of government activities. Instead, editorials about the language of squirrels, the family life of Native Americans, and the situation of publishing in China appeared. Tõnisson invited the editors-in-chief to his office, but none accepted the invitation. The EJU in its letter to the government backed up the action of the newspapers, condemning the restriction of freedom of the press by such extreme methods, and protesting censorship (EAL, 1933, p. 67).

The government tried to solve the conflict with the press by publicizing in September the draft of a new Publishing Act. Compared to the 1923 Act, the new one proposed changes considerably restricting press freedom and suggesting tougher penalties for violations of the Act. The extraordinary meeting of the EJU in October severely criticized the proposed draft law. The EJU Board sent the government a memorandum demanding a revision of the draft law with the participation of experts nominated by the EJU (EAL, 1933). The new Publishing Act, however, was not passed in 1933, because the government resigned and the state of emergency was abolished.

### 3.3. Authoritarian Turn of the 1930s and the EJU

The young Estonian democracy was unstable and one government crisis followed another. The Great Depression of the early 1930s destabilized the internal politics in all Baltic States causing the rise of authoritarian regimes. 'Starting with Lithuania in 1926, each Baltic republic sought relief from chaos in authoritarian order' (Clemens, 2001, p. 76). The internal political upheaval of March 12, 1934 resulted in an authoritarian regime in Estonia with a President having decisive power.

Repressions against civic freedoms started immediately after the coup. All political organizations and parties except the President's one (Isamaaliit/Pro Patria) were forbidden, which was also brought about the end of the party press. Although only a few anti-regime newspapers were closed, the parties behind the newspapers disappeared. The EJU as a non-political association was not banned, but had to reassess its relationship with the state authorities, since press freedom became severely suppressed.

In December 1934, the Government's Propaganda Service was founded, which was later converted into the State Propaganda Service (SPS). The SPS supervised the press, and engaged in post-publishing censorship. Fur-

thermore, newspapers regularly received official government information, scripts of public speeches of leading politicians etc. from the SPS, and had to publish these materials verbatim without commenting. Everything concerning the leading figures of the state or members of the government had to be published in a positive manner (Lauk, 1991, p. 45).

In 1938, the new Constitution legally permitted restricting press freedom to protect state security, public order, morality and the integrity of every citizen. In the spirit of the new Constitution, a new Press Law was passed in 1938, which included all restrictions imposed temporarily on the press during the previous states of emergency. In contrast to the old Act, which only contained one short paragraph of restrictions, it contained 14 issues, which the press was forbidden to publish. Most of them concerned criticism of the activities of governing institutions and leading politicians. The Law also required constructive and positive coverage of the government's activities (Lauk, 1991, p. 47).

It is revealing how the newspapers informed the public about the new Press Law: they all published the same text prepared by the SPS. The newspapers that had recently fiercely protested against the restrictions of the press freedom, now all sang from the same songbook: 'The Press Law aims at curtailing everything that expresses disrespect, disdain and intentional malevolence towards the state order, state's leaders and institutions. The Law requires the placement the forefront of everything...that is the most useful for our social solidarity and social co-operation' (Päevaleht, 1938, p. 5). The cases of the application of the law and the activities of the SPS demonstrate that by the end of the 1930s, the media in Estonia had lost the possibility to fulfil their most important function in a democratic society: to keep the power-holders accountable, and to act as the mechanism of social control and public forum. The crisis of democracy had become the crisis of the media.

How did the EJU respond to the 'Era of Silence' as the authoritarian period is called in Estonian history? The EJU united journalists across a broad political spectrum. During the democratic development of the 1920s journalists saw no problem in supporting the government's efforts in developing an independent Republic of Estonia. The power politics of the governments during the political crises and their robust attempts to silence the press in the 1930s, revealed discrepancies in the visions about the role of journalism in society. In the EJU, some journalists cautiously criticized the government's decisions and practices; others kept silent or were ready to collaborate. A well-defined opposition platform was never formed regarding the government actions against the media. Indeed, pro-government members from the newspapers close to the governing circles gradually took the leading positions in the EJU. This also determined the nature of the public activities of the EJU during the 1930s. The EJU became rather cautious in its public judgments about

<sup>2</sup> Estonian State Archive, file 1.7, 262, p. 77.



any government's decisions concerning the press. Thus, the EJU did not publicly take a stance about the draconian Press Law of 1938. Speaking in Riigikogu on November 2, 1938, the Prime Minister expressed his satisfaction with the EJU and journalists, from whom the government had received 'much help and co-operation' (Lauk, 1994, p. 70). In an editorial of *Päevaleht/Daily Paper* devoted to the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the EJU, the Union's leader Jaan Taklaja emphasized the readiness of the EJU to support the 'constructive national and state building work', and that the ongoing political transformation without doubt has improved our public life' (Taklaja, 1934, p. 1).

It is not so clear how sincere the Union's alliance was with the government. The press had been all but silenced; at least no critical stance was possible. Newspapers acquired a moderate and neutral tone without specifically applauding the government's policies. In a speech at the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration, Jaan Taklaja referred to the inability of the Estonian newspapers to fulfil their duty of 'being critical and consistent, but always accurate in reporting' as was stated in the resolution of the 1921 congress (Lauk, 1994, p. 71). There was also a certain opposition against the EJU leadership throughout the years, with the leading figure Leopold Johanson, who since 1921 had been a member of the EJU as well as an MP. He wrote in the EJU's yearbook 1939: 'Bans and commands that aim at restricting citizen's rights and freedoms, poison political atmosphere everywhere where they are produced, they also poison and paralyze the feeling of citizenship' (Johanson, 1939, p. 38). He also spoke for the freedom of the press in many Riigikogu sessions, the last time as late as in April 1940, two months before the Soviet *coup d'état*.

Authoritarian regimes determine the narrow frames within which journalists operate. 'Authoritarianism excludes the possibility that the press and journalism could achieve significant autonomy, particularly from the state' (Waisbord, 2013, p. 42). A professional association has very limited possibilities to influence political decisions that concern restrictions of the freedom of expression, as the case of the EJU demonstrates. Using legislation, the authorities deprived the press from the right for any critical surveillance and demanded loyalty from the journalists' organization. The means of the next regime, that of Soviet totalitarianism, was not legislation, but violence.

### 3.4. Killing the Messenger: Sovietization and Extermination of the EJU

During the initial months after the Soviet takeover (June 21, 1940), the authorities closed over 200 newspapers and magazines out of the 281 published during the first half of the year (Lauk, 1991, p. 75; Maimik, 1994, p. 99). The leading newspapers were turned, literally overnight, into the new regime's organs. Their facilities, as well as printing houses and printing materials were nationalized. The staffs of the newspapers could continue their work for a short while before they were removed, and the ar-

rests of the editors-in-chief and other leading journalists (especially those with long careers and well-known names) started (Saueauk, 2010, pp. 14–15). It has been discovered that at least 37 journalists were executed during 1940 (Lauk & Pallas, 2008, p. 18).

Journalists, who had been politically active, were treated as enemies. For example, Eduard Laaman, a leading publicist and long-term editor-in-chief of one of the main dailies *Vaba Maa/Free Country*, and the press-attaché of the Estonia's Embassy in Moscow was arrested in February 1941 and executed half a year later in a prison in Kirov. The first managing editor of *Eesti Spordileht/Estonian Sport's Paper* Ado Anderkopp, who had been an MP for nearly 20 years, and minister in several governments was arrested in July 1940 and executed in Tallinn Prison on June 31, 1941 (Pallas, 2002).

The largest cleansing took place in June 1941 during the wave of deportations that began the night of June 14 throughout Estonia. The authorities arrested and deported (often together with their families) most of those journalists who had continued in their jobs, as well as those who had resigned or been fired. Their 'guilt' was having work in the 'bourgeois' press and broadcasting, which was deemed as 'anti-Soviet activity'. The average punishment for this activity was 25 years in Gulag with no right to return home. Thus, the Soviet regime almost completely uprooted Estonian journalism and destroyed the continuity of the profession in the first year of the Soviet occupation. A small number of journalists succeeded in escaping abroad at the end of WWII before the Soviet occupation was completed in September 1944. They established the Estonian exile press in Sweden, Canada, Germany and Australia. The distribution and possession of exile newspapers and magazines were strictly forbidden in Estonia during the Soviet regime.

Unlike other 'bourgeois' organizations, the Soviets did not immediately close the EJU. Instead, under pressure by the authorities, the Board of the EJU 'voluntarily' decided to withdraw the EJU from the FIJ and join the Central Union of Trade Unions of the ESSR; to hand over the EJU's properties and finances and to accept the representatives of the new regime as members of the Union. The Board resigned en masse at the extraordinary general meeting on August 18, 1940. The new Board, which was elected 'openly and entirely unanimously', consisted of communists and some collaborators. At this meeting, the editor-in-chief of the main official daily *Kommunist/Communist*, comrade Nikolai Karotamm imposed the ideologically correct goals for the work of the organization. He also emphasized that journalists must be loyal to the working people, and to 'disclose their enemies' hostile intrigues' or they will find themselves among the enemies of the working class and suffer from the consequences (Lauk & Pallas, 2008, p. 17).

After taking over the editorial offices, the Soviets staffed them with servants of the new regime, most of whom had no journalistic experience. For example, the ECP appointed at least 13 communists with 'under-

ground careers'<sup>3</sup> and 5 Estonian communists who had 'returned'<sup>4</sup> to Estonia in June 1940, to the staffs of the three most important dailies (Veskimägi, 1996, p. 84).

Devotion to the idea of communism and loyalty to the Communist Party remained the main criteria for selecting journalists for the communist press and broadcasting after WWII. Journalistic education and experience, as well as a proper knowledge of Estonian were second-rate criteria. For example, the staff of the Komsomol (Young Communist League's) main organ *Noorte Hääl/The Voice of Youth* in 1946–1948 consisted of 34 'journalists', of whom 30 were members of the ECP or Komsomol and had fought in the Red Army or recently 'returned' from Russia.<sup>5</sup> For a decade after WWII, journalists for Estonian media were educated and trained only in the journalism schools and faculties of the Communist Party Colleges or in Moscow State University according to the Soviet journalist doctrine.

No information has been yet found of the activities of the Sovietized EJU in 1940–1941. During the German occupation, no chance was to revive the EJU. The members, who had survived the violence of the Soviet occupation, had left the jobs. With participation of some members a couple of interwar national dailies were revived, but the German authorities closed them after the first issues had been published. However, several Independence time local newspapers and magazines re-appeared under the strict censorship. The German authorities published the German language *Revaler Zeitung* as their official organ, and two propaganda newspapers in Estonian.

#### 4. The Soviet Estonian Union of Journalists—An Ideological Organization, a Trade Union and a Club

The Soviet regime did not allow journalists to establish a national journalists' organization. The initiative came from the authorities. According to the decree of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR in 1957, regional Journalists' Unions had to be established under the subordination of the all-Soviet Union of Journalists in Moscow, as its sub-organizations. The Central Committee of the ECP (CC ECP) set up an Organizing Committee (OC) and appointed the members with 'irreproachable' pasts and service records in the Soviet Estonian media, as well as in the CC structures.<sup>6</sup> These people were also the first members of the JUESSR, even before the organization was officially launched.<sup>7</sup>

From September 1957 to February 1959, the OC had 34 meetings, which decided important issues of the organization's activities and finances. Similarly, the entire media in the USSR and the journalists' organizations were abundantly subsidised by the state to secure their ability for efficient communist propaganda. The JUESSR was the far largest creative union in Estonian SSR from the outset. In March 1960, it already had 354 members.<sup>8</sup>

The JUESSR was established not as professional, but as a purely ideological organization. In its resolution, the first (founding) congress assured: 'The members of the Journalists' Union of the Estonian SSR will do everything to fulfil the momentous tasks that our beloved Communist Party has assigned to the Soviet journalists'.<sup>9</sup> Several speeches were held in Russian, and all shorthand records in Estonian were translated into Russian.

The JUESSR sent detailed monthly reports (in Russian) to the all-Soviet Journalists' Union about its activities.<sup>10</sup> All these reports, among other issues, declared loyalty to the Communist Party and the common mission of building Communism and fighting its enemies.

However, some segments emerged, which almost from the beginning of the organization went beyond the control of the authorities. Critical and opposition minded journalists started using the work of the JUESSR's sections for advancing professionalism and human values of journalism, trying (and succeeding) to develop a non-ideological discourse for talking to their audiences (Lauk, 1996; Lauk & Kreegipuu, 2010; Miil, 2013).

To organize 'creative work', various sections were formed. Among others, sections of sports, of language and translation, feature journalism in Russian, and satire and information.<sup>11</sup> Later, several new sections were added for journalists covering specific topics; working in radio and TV, and for those working in Russian. In 1972, the Party life section was established under the supervision of the CC ECP. Journalists of this section were supposed to cover the work of the party organizations in industrial enterprises and collective farms, as well as enrich 'the vocabulary and style of the stories dealing with the party life' (Hanson, 1973, pp. 68–82). In 1986, the JUESSR had 13 sections.

The sections arranged various public meetings, exhibitions, journalistic competitions, excursions, thematic seminars, press conferences, round table discussions etc. Indeed, many of these activities had no relation to ideology or 'building communism'. Instead, they aimed at im-

<sup>3</sup> Those who had fought against Estonia's independence during the 1920s–1930s and had been adjudged enemies of the state and declared illegals.

<sup>4</sup> Russian–Estonians who heeded the call from the Communist Party to overthrow the legal Estonian government.

<sup>5</sup> Noorte Häälle vastutava toimetaja A. Slutski aruanne EK(b)P KK sekretärile N. Karotammele 19.10.1948. [Report of the responsible editor of Noorte Hääl, A. Slutsk, to the Secretary of the CC ECP N. Karotamm on 19.10.1948]. ERAf [Branch of Estonian State Archive], F.1, file 47, 35, p. 210.

<sup>6</sup> Ajakirjanike Liidu orgbüroo koosolekute protokollid. [Minutes of the meetings of the Organisational Committee of the Journalists' Union]. ERA.R-1950.1.13, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Ajakirjanike Liidu orgbüroo koosolekute protokollid. [Minutes of the meetings of the Organisational Committee of the Journalists' Union]. ERA.R-1950.1.13, p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> Materjalid Eesti NSV Ajakirjanike Liidu liikmete arvestuse, koosseisu ja liikumise kohta [Materials of membership of the JUESSR] ERA.R-1950.1.366.

<sup>9</sup> I kongressi stenogramm koos juurdekuuluvate lisadega [The transcript of the 1st Congress together with the supplements]. ERA.R-1950.1.8, p. 205.

<sup>10</sup> Informatsioonid liidu loomingulise tegevuse kohta. [Reports on the creative activities of the Journalists' Union]. ERA.R-1950.1.42.

<sup>11</sup> I kongressi stenogramm koos juurdekuuluvate lisadega [The transcript of the 1st Congress together with the supplements] ERA.R-1950.1.8, pp. 11–39.

proving journalistic skills and knowledge, and providing opportunities to socialize with colleagues from other media. In some sections, the members shared a kind of club-like spirit based on common interests and similar life experiences. Several sections did valuable work for developing the Estonian language and culture, and preserving cultural memory. For example, the satire section was skilful in ridiculing the double reality of Soviet society, where on paper the economy advanced at high speed, but in reality shortages of almost everything people needed for normal life were common. Another sphere, in which ridiculing Soviet life reality was possible, was bureaucracy.

The membership card of the JUESSR also opened some doors and access to some services and goods that were otherwise difficult to get (e.g. visits abroad, permission to buy a car or a voucher to go to a health or holiday resort or for getting a flat). Arranging these services was the main trade union function of the JUESSR, as all the issues concerning employment and working conditions were decided in the CC ECP.

After the collapse of the Soviet regime and reinstating Estonia's independence, the Soviet era journalists' union needed to redefine its identity and legitimize itself as an organization for all Estonian journalists. This was more difficult than anyone expected. The Union that came from the 'old' times was not attractive to young journalists. Simultaneously with the transformation of the whole media system, including the basic values and functions of journalism, a generation replacement among journalists took place. About 30 per cent of journalists reached retirement age by the end of the 1980s. The older generations found it difficult to adapt to the new working environment and ways of doing journalism and, within five years of Independence, had left journalism. As the result, 68 per cent of Estonian journalists in 1995 were younger than 40 years old, including most of the editors-in-chief. About half of the journalists of the 1990s had no experience of employment in the Soviet media (Lauk, 1996, pp. 66–67). Under the changed economic circumstances, the new journalists did not see a need for a trade union. They had no problem in getting well-paid jobs when the media market was enlarging rapidly and the demand for good journalists was higher than the supply.

In addition, the Union had discredited itself with a failed attempt at running its own print business. As the state financing had stopped the Union was in financial difficulties. In 1994, when the Union had its annual congress, it appeared inquorate, as too few of the members attended. Even the cessation of the Union was then discussed, but instead, a committee was put together to revive it (Tootsen, 2004, p. 276).

## 5. Resuscitating the EJU

In the early 1990s, the question of continuity in terms of legal succession arose. Together with the Soviet Union,

the JUESSR ceased to exist. The original name, the EJU, was restored and the 1995 congress, initiated by veterans of the JUESSR, adopted new Statutes. The EJU did not declare itself to be a legal successor of the JUESSR, but of the interwar journalists' union, although this was legally very difficult to prove. However, the existing EJU, like the interwar EJU, functions simultaneously as a trade union and a professional organization, and carries similar values and professional ethos. Therefore, it can fairly be regarded as the successor of the first Estonian journalists' association.

In 1994, the Union had 1,941 members (Tootsen, 2004, p. 248). After the 1995 congress, journalists were invited to re-register their membership and 467 veterans did so. In the next five years, about 400 new members joined. By the end of the 1990s membership was about 900, but by 2017 had declined to about 300.<sup>12</sup>

Since Estonia's Independence, the EJU has not been involved in politics, although many of its members actively participated in the independence movement and were also elected as MPs. The EJU is primarily oriented towards professional activities and standing for the interests of journalists in relations with employers. The Union participated in establishing a Code of Ethics of Estonian Journalism and the Estonian Press Council ASN, which for the first time in Estonian journalism history developed the practice of solving people's complaints against the media. However, the organization has not been able to gain enough popularity and authority among journalists to represent the whole journalistic community of Estonia. Unlike many bigger countries, alternative journalists' organizations have not been established.

## 6. Discussion and Conclusions

The case of Estonia's journalists' organization clearly indicates how much the process of professionalization of journalism depends on external powers. This article focused primarily on political and historical conditions that determine the frames within which journalists operate, and which allow or not allow them certain extent of autonomy. Estonian journalism in the 1920s had favourable conditions for journalism to develop towards an independent occupation. The democratic framework of a nation state, freedom of expression enshrined in the Constitution and non-restrictive press legislation created an environment where the ability of the press to influence and form public opinion and public agenda were clearly palpable (Lauk, 2000). Journalism as a field and occupation had the necessary preconditions for building institutional boundaries and achieving a certain degree of autonomy, both individual inside these boundaries, and collective, in relation to external factors. The EJU strove to define values and standards of the profession and to achieve its legal recognition. It also became an organization that stood for the interests of journalistic community, as a whole.

<sup>12</sup> Eesti Ajakirjanike Liit. Available at [https://et.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eesti\\_Ajakirjanike\\_Liit](https://et.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eesti_Ajakirjanike_Liit)



Political upheavals change the contexts and strengthen the pressures on the media from the external influences and powers. Both the internal and external boundaries of journalistic autonomy need to be reconsidered and renegotiated. Professional association is in the position of struggling for those conditions where at least a certain extent of independence is possible. During the authoritarian period in Estonia, a propaganda institution was established to direct and control the press in the interests of the state authorities. The EJU had no choice but to co-operate with the government. However, the EJU reached a compromise with the authorities when agreeing to follow the rules of the 'Era of Silence' (including a restriction of the press freedom) and receiving the government's approval in return. As a result, the EJU managed to maintain the statutes, membership and the continuity of the association and offer some solidarity to journalists in trouble (Juraite et al., 2009). When newspapers were silenced, cautious criticism of the authorities was possible in the EJU's yearbook.

Hallin and Mancini (2004, p. 37) refer to the 'control of the media by outside actors—parties, politicians, social groups or movements, or economic actors seeking influence' as 'instrumentalization'. In a way, the authoritarian government instrumentalized Estonian journalism in the 1930s, and thus prepared the ground for the next period of shackled journalism, the Soviet totalitarian regime.

The Soviet authorities eradicated the press and exterminated Estonia's entire journalistic community from the independence era. No negotiations or compromise were possible. For the next five decades, from 1940 to the early 1990s, the media in Estonia was put into the position of an instrument of the Communist Party for securing and strengthening its power as the leader of the whole society. While recruiting journalists, the regime did not rely on the small number of local collaborators, but used its own myrmidons, mainly with Russian background. They ruled Estonian journalism throughout the post WWII Stalinist decade.

Gradually, the composition of the journalistic community changed. Journalism graduates from the University of Tartu (where journalism education in Estonian was established in 1954), and graduates of other specialties and Universities occupied most of the leading positions in the media. The obvious contradiction of the Soviet propaganda with national values and collective memory of people, and the conflict between the content of the official media and real life-world contributed to the development of an oppositional frame of mind among journalists (Miil, 2013). A critical mass of journalists existed who created a sophisticated metaphorical discourse for expressing opposition between the lines, which was well received by Estonian audiences. In 'a small language community like Estonia, there were considerably large intelligent audiences who were able to follow quite complicated cultural codes and who felt themselves participating in common anti-power language games, led by na-

tional media' (Lauk, 1996, p. 97). By developing such a double discourse, the journalistic community created certain space of inner autonomy, which enabled creativity and generated common spirit.

The journalists' association of 1957 was set up according to the orders and instructions of the authorities in Moscow and not on any initiative from the inside the occupation. However, some segments of less controlled, and apolitical activities became possible within the limited space of inner autonomy. The organization strove to advance journalists' professional skills and knowledge, their contacts with audiences, and their economic situation. In the situation, where 'political, rather than distinctively journalistic criteria...guide the practice of journalism' (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 37), these activities were vital for maintaining the integrity of journalistic occupation. After Independence, the organization immediately distanced itself from politics and government, and operates today as a combination of trade union and professional organization, although not representing the majority of Estonian journalists.

This article focussed on the struggles of Estonian journalists' organization for collective autonomy throughout different political contexts from the early 1920s to the early 1990s. The Estonian case proves again that journalistic autonomy can never be absolute, but its boundaries are always pliable and submissive. Autonomy 'is the outcome of negotiations, compromises, and struggles inside the journalistic field, as well as in its relation with external fields' (Waisbord, 2013, p. 66). Also, the case demonstrates how much journalistic autonomy is historically contingent.

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